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# **Participatory Institutions and People's Practices in India: An analysis of Decentralisation experiences in Kerala State**

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# **Participatory Institutions and People's Practices in India: An analysis of Decentralisation experiences in Kerala State**

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## **Abstract**

*Institutions orient people towards a common goal. Institutions have a pertinent role in collective action. Participatory institutions have the potential to vitalize democracy by providing a pro active role to the citizens in decision making, planning and implementation of activities. In fact the performance of the institutions depends upon the practices of the people affiliated to them. The practices of the people are influenced by the field in which they are situated, and their habitus. Ultimately field (It is an objective historical relation between the positions in each realm of the society) and habitus ( It is the way in which field enters in to an individual) are the decisive factors in people's practices. Kerala's decentralization experiments since the inception of the People's Planning Campaign in 1996 have given more emphasis to participatory institutions. PPC viewed participatory institutions as forums for mobilizing different groups of people towards grassroots level democracy. This paper analyses the dynamics of institutions created by PPC in Kerala in light of their twelve years of functioning. The Paper also considers various factors that might have affected the functioning of institutions through a detailed analysis of Kerala's political, economic, cultural and religious fields.*

Kerala has been noted for its remarkable achievements as manifested in human development indicators. Higher life expectancy, lower infant mortality rate, high level of literacy and universal elementary education are prominent among them (CDS 2005). It has been argued that Kerala's achievements were the result of social mobilization which had started from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Tharakan 2004, Tharamangalam 2007).

It was argued that on the basis of the human development indicators, and administrative reforms such as land reforms, Kerala was all set for meaningful decentralization of government, and for democratization at the grass roots (Gurukkal 2001). Despite these

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favorable facts, Kerala has a poor history in democratic decentralization. Even though different governments attempted to introduce decentralization in the state through different bills presented in the legislative assembly, most of them lacked continuity (Parameswaran 2001). In the 1996 elections the left Democratic Front (LDF) came to power in the state. It was also the time when the 9<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan was taking shape. The government decided to launch a mass campaign named People's Planning Campaign (PPC) for democratic decentralization and inaugurated it on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1996 (KSPB 1999). The major objectives of the campaign were to develop and sustain a participatory methodology for local level planning with mass participation, and to generate a new civic culture in favour of grass roots democracy. It also aimed to bring attitudinal changes among all actors related to Local Self Governments, such as elected representatives, officials, non official experts and people at large towards development and grass roots democracy (KSPB 1999, Isaac&Frankie 2000). Various participatory institutional systems and different practices were developed to attain these objectives. It includes macro level institutions like district and block level expert committees for plan appraisal and approval and micro level participatory institutions such as Task Forces for plan formulation, Beneficiary committees for plan implementation. Neighborhood groups and Self Help Groups were also promoted as part of the People's Planning Campaign. The constitutional entity of Gramasabha was innovatively employed as a tool for mass mobilization in the democratic process during the PPC period in Kerala (Isaac and Frankie 2000). It was expected that these institutions would play a key role in the process of mobilization of different strata of people towards participatory plan formulation and implementation. The PPC continued till 2001.

In the 2001 elections the LDF government (which led the campaign) was replaced by the United Democratic Front (UDF). Their attempt was to institutionalize the decentralization process, rather than continue the campaign model. They renamed the programme as Kerala Development Programme. Notwithstanding this, the institutions created by PPC continued in one form or the other also in the KDP phase.

Decentralization process in Kerala has entered its thirteenth year since PPC. The institutions created by PPC continued after the campaign phase. Institutions are intended to orient the actions of people towards particular goal and to bring changes in their behavioral pattern (Eisenstadt 1968). Likewise PPC also had ideal objectives to attain through various institutional structures. Democratic institutions are considered as tools for inculcating

democratic values among the people (Giddens 1972). They are expected to strengthen the processes for the democratic participation of people. PPC also had such an ideal objective.

This paper is an attempt to analyse the dynamics of participatory institutions created in Kerala as the part of the decentralization efforts started from 1996, with PPC. The other intention of this paper is to understand how the different actors affiliated to these institutions have internalized and reproduced them through their practices. This Paper also focus to explore what were the social, cultural, political, and economic factors that may have influenced the practices of the people towards these institutions, through a macro analysis of Kerala's various fields. Major focus of this inquiry will be limited to the time period of 1996 to 2006, the Period of PPC and KDP. Initially the paper will be analyzing the theoretical literature related to the concepts of Participatory institutions and Practices. Theoretical analysis will be followed by the analysis of Studies on PPC and KDP, in the light of theoretical postulates.

### **Institutions – Conceptual issues**

Institutions consist of cognitive, normative and regulative structures and activities that provide stability, coherence and meaning to social behavior. They enable the actors to coordinate their activities by means of orientation to a common sign post (Lachman 1970). Institutions have a crucial role in society, which orients the actions of different sets of actors towards a common goal. There are formal and informal institutions. Formal institutions are formed through legislations or systematic process, while informal institutions are formed through customary practice, rules or norms that have persisted over time. North (in Harris 2000) argues that institutions are found precisely to reduce uncertainty in human exchange. They also reduce the problem of asymmetric information among different actors.

Max Weber's view was that an increasing number of rational, legal authority and institutions is the evidence of society's advancement towards modernization and democratization (Giddens 1972). He considered parliamentary democratic institutions as a training centre for leaders. Writings on Institutions highlights the fact that, they have an important role in collective action. An Institution is a social unit that has the purpose of achieving collective goals or to meet institutional needs in society.

## **Participatory institutions and democracy**

Participatory democratic theories attempt to bring the roots of democracy beyond the representative system, which delimits the role of citizens in preferential voting (Farrelly 2004). In his classical theory about participatory democracy Rousseau emphasizes the need of educating the public for the democratization of society (Pateman 1999). He visualizes that participatory institutions will protect the free will of the people and assumed that the role of participation lies in enabling collective decision. John Stuart Mill suggested that political institutions will promote the mental advancement of individuals towards community goals. It was believed that in popular participatory institutions active public- spiritedness will be fostered and it will lead to responsible political action (Pateman 1999). GDH Cole argued that democratic principles must be applied in all fields in order to get participatory democratic training to people. Individuals will learn democracy only through participating at the local level. The above theories lay greater emphasis on the educative role of participatory institutions. They considered participation as a basic prerequisite for fostering democratic culture. By participation, they mean being involved in decision making.

Modern radical participatory theories go beyond the limits of the above mentioned theories. Earlier participatory democrats assumed that people would be attracted to political participation only if they had the opportunities, time and resources. Modern concepts of deliberative and discursive democracies conceive participation as a more radical process, which is an inevitable element because of the functional pressure of complex modern society (Warren 1995). In deliberative democracy one must participate in authentic deliberation, not simply express preferences through voting. Here collective decisions are not reached through mere enforced consensus, but engage in deliberation with those who disagree with us, expressing a willingness to listen to others, to take their concerns seriously and to find some common ground, so that compromises or consensus can be achieved (Farrelly 2004). To engage in the deliberative process is to seek a consensus and persuade your opponents by argument, not by force or coercion.

While deliberative democracy gives more emphasis to consensus building through deliberations, discursive democracy gives more emphasis to self transformation and empowerment. Discourse is considered as a way to the empowerment of self and assertion of individual autonomy (Warren 1995). But this discourse would not always result in consensus

building and collective action. Habermas viewed discursive democracy as a functional necessity of modern complex society.

### **Theoretical underpinnings of practice**

As mentioned above institutions provide a means of orientation to a large number of actors. They enable the actors to co-ordinate their activities (Lachman 1970). But the nature of institutional performance in different society will be different. Success of institutions also depends upon relative success of different interest groups who try to establish their interest on institutional sphere (Eisenstadt 1968). In real practice institutional system is never fully accepted to same degree by all those participating in it. Practices are the different patterns and approaches people follow in their day to day life (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). The practice of institutional ideals by the actors will depend on their access to power, power differences and divergent interest among people involved in it (Eisenstadt 1968). The practices of people related to each institution are very important in deciding their success or failure.

The French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has developed an explanation to the theoretical underpinnings of practices of the people. He introduced the concepts of *field*, and *habitus* as basic corner stones in deciding the practices of people (Bourdieu 1989, Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Bourdieu identifies social structure as a combination of different fields like political field, religious field, artistic field, field of class differences and field of power, each of them having their own logic (Wacquant & Bourdieu 1992). The social structure and different fields working in that structure have the role of reproduction of social practices.

The field consists of a set of objective historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power or capital. To Bourdieu society is an ensemble of relatively autonomous spheres of play (fields) that cannot be collapsed under the overall societal logic. Each field possesses its particular values and its own regulative principles. These principles delimit a socially structured space in which agents struggle, depending on the positions they may occupy in that space, either to change or to preserve its boundaries and forms. (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 15, 16). Field is basically a set of relationships between positions which are defined by the power or capital owned by the participants in each specific field. Fields are the spaces of competition and conflicts between the interests of the participants, in this struggle the success of each of them will depend upon the species and volume of capital held by them. Here, by the term capital, Bourdieu not only means economic capital, he expands

the categories of capital into cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital rather than the single category of capital that is economic capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Those who dominate in the given field are in a position to make its function to their advantage, but they always face resistance, and contention from the dominated. Though societal structure is the combination of various fields, each field has its own logic which cannot be reduced to the logic of the other. In order to understand the dynamics of each field we have to understand the inner power relations, conflicts, and competitions within each field.

Habitus consists of a set of historical relation between positions deposited within individual bodies, in the form of mental and corporeal schemata or perception, appreciation and action (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:16). Being the product of history it is an open system of dispositions that is constantly affected by them in a way that either modifies or reinforces its structures. The field enters into an individual through habitus, it is a structured structure by the field through a historical process, and structuring structure of individuals as a system of conditioning. The function of habitus is only relational to certain structures that are fields associated with that habitus, or in other words the fields that can influence the habitus of individuals. The practices produced by the habitus as a strategy generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever changing situations. Habitus is a historically constructed product deposited within individuals, which define the nature of their practices in the living world. Bourdieu views social agents as products of history, of the history of the whole social field and the accumulated experience of a past work in the specific subfield. Every individual is closely affiliated to one field, which can professionally influence their habitus, which has a critical role in defining their practices. But at the same time as a part of the total social structure, other fields also can make the minor influence upon individuals in their own ways according to the capital he/she holds (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:133,135).

The reproduction of the social order happens through the practices of the individuals, who lived within each society. Every institution which has ideal dreams in their origins will be reproduced through the practices of the individuals and groups who are involved in their activities in their respective fields. So the success or failure of the institutions will depend upon the practices of the individuals or groups related to them. On this background we have to analyse Kerala's decentralization experiences with special emphasis on functioning of participatory institutions during PPC and KDP phases.

## **People's Planning Campaign and institutions**

People's planning campaign in Kerala was viewed as a dynamic movement for democratic decentralization. The novel objectives of the programme and its mass mobilization strategies were widely appreciated ( Heller 2001, Tornquist 2001, Sharma 2007). The uniqueness of PPC was that it aimed to achieve its objectives by creating appropriate participatory institutions. These institutions were intended to provide greater opportunities for citizens to participate in decision making, implementation and monitoring of development activities.

As with the theoretical assumptions about institutions, the institutions created by PPC also had a common orientation towards a collective goal i.e., developing a means for local level participatory planning through mass mobilization. At the initiation of PPC, it was expected that planning would become an instrument for social mobilization and the participatory institutions will become tool for this mobilization (KSPB 1999, Isaac & Frankie 2000).

Likewise the theoretical assumptions about participatory institutions regarding the generation of new set of norms, values and social behaviors to strengthen the democratic culture, PPC also intended to generate a democratic civic culture in favour of participatory development and grass roots democratic institutions, and to bring attitudinal changes among different actors related to the institutions (KSPB 1999). PPC also planned to utilize the favorable tradition of the state of collective mobilization and public action, reflected through the presence of wider network of class and mass organization and autonomous civil society organizations. A state and civil society synergy was expected through the higher involvement of class and mass organization and autonomous civil society organizations, through out the campaign process (Isaac & Frankie 2000).

The theoretical concern of participatory democracy i.e., the participation of people in actual decision making through democratic institutions was also intended to be realized through the PPC process. In this process special emphasis was given to the hitherto marginalized classes like women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (KSPB 1999, Isaac and Frankie 2000). Like the organizational sociological assumption (Eisenstadt 1968), PPC also intended to bring changes in the balance of power in society. PPC had the key objective of empowering marginalized groups, and ensure their increased involvement in the mainstream development activities. The concept of deliberative democracy has been brought into the People's campaign by providing opportunity to the people for participating in discussions and the



decision making process through various participatory institutions. The discursive democratic concepts of self assertion and empowerment have been brought into the PPC process by providing discursive forums for the marginalized groups

### **Kerala Development Programme:-A shift from campaign to institutionalization**

PPC was continued till 2001 when the Congress led UDF came to power. After being voted to power they renamed the programme Kerala Development Programme. What was sought to be done was to make an end to the campaign approach towards decentralization and to institutionalize the system (Kerala Government Order 2002, 2004). The element of voluntarism in the campaign was reduced considerably. The system of different levels of resource persons was abolished and full time coordinators of BLEC and DLEC were sent back to their departments. The number of task force members was also considerably reduced; mandatory women and SC/ST participation in task forces was reduced. Beneficiary committees for plan implementation have been discouraged.

The basic structure of the programme and funding to institutions of Local Self Governments has not changed. But the mandatory earmarking of funds for state government programmes was considerably increased, and that affected the freedom of Local Self Governments in their own planning (Kerala Government Order 2002, 2004). The Tribal sub plan of the LSG's has been taken back to government department. The special schemes under Modernizing Government Programme (MGP) of Kerala for strengthening LSG's were oriented towards more professional bureaucratic process than mass oriented strengthening of decentralization system. Even though these set backs have happened there was scope for further innovations in local level planning. But that does not seem to have happened in Kerala. In the 2006 election the LDF came back to power in the state and reintroduced the People's Planning campaign. There is no considerable change visible in the implementation of the activities, though the name of the programme has been reintroduced. The programme has not been able either to overcome the limitation of PPC and KDP phases or to bring back the campaign mood of PPC (The HINDU 20-2-2009).

There is a close relationship between the functioning of the institutions and the practices followed by the different actors affiliated to them. Thus the actual practices followed by different actors related to PPC has prominent role in the performance of the institutions. A detailed analysis of the dynamics of PPC and KDP is required in order to understand how the

different actors reproduced the institutions through their actual practices. The next portion of this paper is an attempt to consolidate the hitherto available studies on last thirteen years Kerala's decentralization experiences, especially during PPC and KDP phase.

### **Contextual findings of the major studies**

There are several studies about the overall performance of PPC, whereas very few studies have been conducted on the performance of the KDP. Even though institutional analysis has been given space in some studies, they deal with predominantly technical aspects.

It is generally argued that the PPC created a momentum in Kerala society in favour of decentralization. It also made remarkable achievements in increasing infrastructure such as roads, bridges, home, water supply and sanitation in rural areas (Jagajeevan&Rajesh 2005). To a great extent it has demystified the concept of planning and succeeded in evolving a methodology for participatory planning. It succeeded in creating criteria for sectoral allocation, allotting grant- in- aid to local bodies through direct budgetary provisioning, developing networks of woman SHG's, and in creating a large number of people with some knowledge in decentralized planning. Most of the beneficiaries of PPC have been drawn from the lower social strata. Grama Sabhas have also become a forum for the articulation of the needs of the down trodden groups (Chathukulam & John 2002). Most of the studies highlight the fact that Kerala's decentralization process was a success in terms of creating physical achievements.

Even though PPC succeeded in attaining physical gains the basic assumptions of the PPC about the state civil society synergy to vitalize participatory institutions and grass roots democracy have not proved to be valid. Except KSSP (Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad), the people science movement in Kerala, other organizations as a whole were not involved in this process (Tornquist 2001, Chathukulam & John 2002, Tharakan 2004). The basic argument of the PPC proponents about the creation of civic culture through the collective action of organizational network has not materialised. Because of this reason, institutions created by the PPC were not able to generate mass mobilization in the expected size and form (Heller 2001).

Political parties in Kerala, especially the parties in the coalition which led the campaign (LDF) were unable to function in a way, expected by PPC. The class and mass organizations

affiliated to the political parties also turned out to be highly clientelistic in nature and became the front organizations of political parties rather than autonomous organizations ( Heller 2001,Tharakan 2004). Institutions have a key role in nurturing collective interests over diverse groups and special interests. But the PPC's institutional mechanism to a great extent failed in serving this purpose (Tornquist 2001, Tharakan 2004).

In Kerala, where even local body elections are taking place on a political party basis, the political parties have a prominent role in grass roots level democratic institutions. In this respect the attempts made by the political parties to inculcate the value of new participatory institutions among their core activists and followers at the grass roots level is very important. But some general observations indicate that there was no such serious attempt from the political parties especially from the CPI(M), the ruling party during PPC phase in this regard. It is also noted that no serious attempt was made by the parties to resolve the problems generated within the process, especially the conflicts within the Parliamentary party and organizational party at the local level (Parameswaran 2001, Chathukulam & John 2007).

### **Specific Reflections on Participatory Institutions**

Different studies during Peoples Planning Campaign and Kerala Development Programme periods have shed light into the dynamics of participatory institutions. It is viewed that though Kerala has adopted a more innovative strategy to form developmental projects, through the need based group discussions in Grama Sabhas, the initial enthusiasm of conducting Grama sabhas eventually has given way to a routinised mechanical process. The upper and middle class participation in Grama sabhas has reduced considerably and they have been turned into forums for Below Poverty Line (BPL) families (Nair 2000, Central Planning Commission 2006). Functioning of the Neighbor hood Groups (NHGs) which were introduced to rejuvenate the grassroots democratic process, as a subset of Grama sabhas materialized only in one quarter of the local bodies all over the state (Isaac & Frankie 2000).they also failed to continue during the KDP period. The Task Forces were the other innovative experiment of PPC to prepare the local bodies projects at different sectors. This institution has been functioning in Kerala for the last thirteen years, but it was observed that very few Task Forces were able to create innovative project ideas and to ensure the technical feasibility of the projects (Nair 2000,CPC 2006, Sharma 2007).Beneficiary committees, which were formed to undertake public works at the local level during PPC phase, was an

attempt to bring local community participation in plan implementation. Studies show that hostile attitude of officials, officials and contractors nexus, lack of community cooperation were the major hurdles in their functioning. It was also found that one third of the beneficiary committees are either led by contractors or by their nominees (Nair 2000, CPC 2006, Sharma 2007).

### **Structural factors influencing institutions**

The preceding part of this article attempted to examine the Kerala's decentralization experiences and practices of various actors with special focus on the institutions worked during PPC and KDP phases. Since we are applying Peire Bourdieu's concepts of Field and Habitus in understanding the practice of the people, we have to analyze the nature of major fields in Kerala society, their peculiarities and their influence on participatory institutions. Here we have to understand the controlling factors of people's practices emerging out of different fields, through the analysis of Kerala's major social fields. The remaining portion of this paper attempts to analyse the various controlling factors that emerged out of different fields of Kerala society that might have influenced the habitus of the individuals affiliated to participatory institutions and their practices

Some pertinent factors which are visible in Kerala's political, cultural, economic, religious fields may have controlled the practices and involvement of common people in participatory institutions. In the field of economy it is worth mentioning that Kerala is a society with a higher rate of inequality in terms of per capita consumption expenditure, income and asset holding. It is noted that gini coefficient value which indicates the inequality in terms of per capita consumption expenditure is higher in the state than the all India average, and it increased from 0.348 in 1999 to 3.92 in 2000-2005, in the neo liberal economic phase. It is also important that the above value in urban Kerala is 0.4 which is internationally considered as representing excessive inequality (KSSP 2006, Subramanian&Prasad2008). The relative deprivation of SCs, STs and marine fisher folk in the state is far higher than the general population (CDS 2005). The status of SCs and STs in the state is very low in terms of ownership of houses, access to drinking water and electricity and other basic amenities. The Marine fishing community faces challenges of high child mortality, low literacy, low number of electrified houses, low access to drinking water and poor sanitation facilities (Chadopadhyaya 2004, GOK2005, KSSP 2006).

Though Kerala has succeeded in reducing the percentage of poor among its population, the inequality within the society or cleavages among the social classes seems to be increasing (Tharakan 2008). Kerala has a history of social and political mobilisation led by the middle class and the upper middle class for the rights of the poor. The recent transition of Kerala's economic field was manifested through the withdrawal of middle and upper middle class groups from public utility services and the public space. It is evident from the mushrooming of private education institutions all over the state and the declining enrolment of these groups in the public educational system (KSSP2006). Withdrawal from public space and institutions is a class strategy to create a different class consciousness and to demarcate lower class from them. All the public forums will become branded as the forums for the poor and marginalized. This may be the factor that is reflected in the absence of middle, upper middle class and educated youth from the Grama Sabhas in the state, after some initial enthusiasm. The unequal class relations and the higher rate of inequality visible in the economic field might have been influential in structuring the habitus of the middle and upper middle class groups and their involvement in public spaces and participatory democratic institutions. Along with this the marginality of SC's and ST's in mainstream society might have restricted their interventions within participatory institutions. This may have weakened their articulations based on right consciousness, though PPC had attempted to provide specific forums and programmes for their empowerment.

The other important field which can influence the participatory institutions is political field. Historically, Kerala's political field was not favorable to decentralization. The Marxist ideologue EMS Namboodiripad, who had been arguing for decentralization of the administrative system from the 1950s onwards, noted that in 1967 when the District Council Bill was being discussed at the ministerial and the ruling party level, he hardly got any support from the ministry itself (EMS in CDS 1993). He also noted that support coming out of the party was also not fully favorable in nature. It has been observed that decentralisation became a victim of the political rivalry and opposing policies of two political coalitions. From 1957 onwards different governments have introduced different bills in the state assembly to introduce decentralization in the state, none of them got any continuity till the constitutionally backed bill in 1994 (Issac&Frankie 2000, Sharma 2007). Along with the background of Kerala Pachayati Raj act 1994, several discussions about the Kerala economy, especially the production sector and several micro level experiments for local planning by

civil society groups like Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) have created the environment for the mass campaign for democratic decentralization, realized through PPC in 1996 (Isaac & Frankie 2000).

Even though PPC was observed as a political project supported by the ruling party, CPI(M) with the formal consensus of the other major political parties including opposition parties, the politics or real idea of the campaign did not disseminated among the ruling party, CPI(M) cadre party system itself (Parameswaran 2001). There was an eclectic notion among the key actors of PPC itself regarding its basic objectives and strategies (Gurukul 2001). The experiments from the field also endorsed the fact that political party institutions at the local level and their mass organisations were not clear about their role in PPC and the politics of the campaign (Chathikulam & John, Sharma 2007).

The apathetic approach of the political parties, and lacunae in disseminating the political vision and ideas of PPC among the grassroots level political party system might have been an impediment in equipping their common allies according to the need of PPC. It is noted that there seems political deficit in Kerala's decentralization attempts in terms of successful repoliticisation of issues. lacunae in attracting public based on common goals rather than protecting divisive interests (Tornquist 2007). This lethargy from political parties might have led to the casual involvement of political party allies in the decentralization process rather than proactive interventions. This was later manifested in the silent acceptance of Kerala society when some of the powers were taken back from the Panchayats at the initial stage of Kerala Development Programme, when the Left Democratic Front government was replaced by the United Democratic Front in state power.

The developments in the civil society and religious spheres were also not supportive to the grass roots democratic institutions. The clientelistic politics followed by the political parties after the liberation movement in 1959 in order to please the religious bargaining groups, led to the erosion of democratic values and became a hurdle to the democratic process itself (Tharakan 2004, Tornquist 2007). The tendency that started in the political field later extended to the cultural and social fields which further led to the strengthening of religious groups in the social field and weakening of the secular space of Kerala society. An Increasing number of communal and religious organisations resulted in the fragmentation of Kerala's civil society on caste and communal basis, that badly affected the sustenance and growth of

movements which protected the secular values in society like literary movements, library movements and people's science movements.

The growing separation in Kerala's social field in terms of religious, caste, and commercial interests may affect the material base of public action, especially any movement in favour of poor (Tharakan 2008). This phenomenon is reflected in the formation of various self help groups of women in the same locality on the label of different caste and religious organisations. Parallel institutions initiated by caste and communal organisations also may have made unfavourable impacts upon participatory institutions. These changes in the social and cultural field might have contributed to the shaping of Habitus of individuals affiliated to them, leading to their practice of being more pro active towards rigid caste and communal activities rather than participating in the activities for the common good of the society. This also may have led to the low participation of various groups in common forums like Grama Sabha.

## **Conclusion**

Kerala's decentralization experiment has a unique space among decentralization attempts within the country. The Introduction of the participatory methodology for local level planning, applied through the participatory institutions was the prominent feature of this experiment. It was also expected to create a new civic culture in terms of state – civil society synergy for common good. This was expected to be realized through the active involvement of politically linked class and mass organisations and autonomous civil society organisations, in the participatory institutions. But most of the studies assert the fact that, though Kerala's decentralization attempts started from 1996 succeeded in creating physical achievements, it failed to attain its objectives in terms of nurturing grass roots democratic culture and bringing higher involvement of civil society into the activities of participatory institutions.

Theoretical observations about the functioning of institutions indicate that the actual practices of different actors affiliated to them have a key role in deciding their success or failure. The broad social structure and the dynamics of various fields in that structure have a decisive role in designing people's practices. In this respect the analysis of various fields highlights the fact that the lethargy existed in the political field towards the decentralization process, high level of inequality and increasing middle classisation reflecting in the state's economic field, and fragmentation of the civil society in terms of caste and religious organisations have

altogether created an unfavorable social environment for the functioning of grassroots participatory institutions working for the common good of the society, rather than for fragmented individual and group interests. These tendencies in various fields might have influenced the creation of people's habitus and their practices. Along with this traditionally marginalized situation of communities like SCs , STs and fisher folks also might have restricted their bargaining capacity and intervention possibilities within participatory institutions. The pertinent factor emerging out of this analysis is that intensive public education process to disseminate the participatory democratic values and institutional goals among various fields of the society is a basic pre requisite for the effective functioning of any kind of participatory institutions.

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